



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Haiti

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles and a population of 8.4 million.

A U.N. Population Fund census released in May 2006 (based on 2003 data) revealed the following religious demographics: 54.7 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, 15.4 percent was Baptist, 7.9 percent Pentecostal, 3 percent Adventist, 2.1 percent voodoo (vodun), 1.5 percent Methodist, 0.7 percent Episcopalian, 0.5 percent Jehovah's Witnesses, 0.07 percent Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 0.02 percent Muslim, and 0.4 percent other religious affiliation; 10.2 percent reported they followed no religion. Census data did not account for the remaining 3.51 percent of the population.

The figure for voodoo represented only those who selected voodoo as their primary religion. A much larger segment of the population practiced voodoo alongside Christianity (most commonly with Catholicism) and considered Christianity their primary religion. While the Government officially recognized voodoo as a religion in 2003, it continued to be frowned upon by the elite, conservative Catholics, and Protestants. The Government provides no legal status for voodoo except for its recognition as a legitimate religious practice.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that practices do not disturb law and order, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The constitution directs the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The administration and monitoring of religious affairs falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cults. The Bureau of Religious Affairs within the ministry is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries.

The following holy days are observed officially as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Recognition by the Bureau of Religious Affairs affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects churches' tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to church documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Requirements for registration with the bureau include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a list of members of the religious organization, and a list of social projects of the organization. Registered religious groups are required to submit an annual report of their activities to the bureau. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations were registered with the ministry. Many nondenominational Christian groups and voodoo practitioners have not sought official status; however, there were no reports of any instance in which this requirement hampered the operation of a religious group. According to the Government, many groups--Christian and voodoo--do not seek official recognition simply because they operate informally.

Goods brought into the country for use by registered churches and missionaries are exempted from customs duties, and registered churches are not taxed. Some church organizations have complained that customs officials sometimes refused to honor a church's tax-exempt status; however, it appeared that these refusals generally were attempts by corrupt officials to extort bribes rather than to limit religious practices.

For many years Roman Catholicism was the official religion of the country. While this official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 constitution, neither the Government nor the Holy See has renounced the 1860 concordat, which continues to serve as the basis for relations between the Catholic Church and the state, as well as for the operation of Catholic religious orders. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religions. Official and quasi-official functions are held in Catholic churches and cathedrals, such as "Te Deum" Masses for Independence Day, Flag Day, and Founders Day. However, in the past several years the Government has recognized the growing role of Protestant churches. For example, Protestant and Episcopal clergy and voodoo practitioners have been invited to participate when the religious sector is asked to play an advisory role in politics.

Many foreign missionaries are affiliated with U.S.-based denominations or individual churches. Others are associated with independent, nondenominational Christian groups. Missionary groups operate hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics throughout the country. According to a 2004 survey, eighty-three religious groups sent temporary missions on a regular basis to participate in relief and humanitarian activities.

Foreign missionaries enter on regular tourist visas and submit paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to register with the Bureau of Religious Affairs. While some missionaries were concerned by the slowness of the Government to issue residence permits, there was no indication that the delay was due to obstructionism.

The constitution stipulates that persons cannot be required to join an organization or receive religious instruction contrary to their convictions. Therefore, in Catholic or Protestant parochial schools, the school authorities may not permit proselytization on behalf of the church with which they are affiliated.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Religion plays a prominent role in society. Many citizens display a keen interest in religious matters and freely express their religious beliefs.

Ecumenical organizations existed. Interfaith cooperation was perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools.

While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices that flourish, Christian attitudes toward voodoo varied. Many Christians accept voodoo as part of the country's culture, but others regard it as incompatible with Christianity. This difference in views led to isolated instances of conflict in the past; however, no such instances were reported during the period covered by this report. The Bureau of Religious Affairs managed periodic tension between some Protestant and voodoo groups effectively. Tensions between Protestant and voodoo groups were local in nature and usually involved land disputes or conflicts over proselytizing. In some cases, the bureau sends representatives to assist local authorities in settling such disputes. The parties in conflict usually accept the ministry's mediating role.

Some Protestant and Catholic clergy were politically active. One Protestant pastor led the Christian Movement for a New Haiti political party, and another led the National Union of Christians for the Renovation of Haiti political party. Several Catholic priests remained among the leadership of the Fanmi Lavalas party of past president Jean Bertrand Aristide, a former Catholic priest. The Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Protestant Federation occasionally issued statements on political matters.

Particularly in rural areas, past accusations of sorcery were known to lead to mob violence resulting in deaths. Women generally were targeted in these cases, which usually were precipitated by the death of a child from unknown causes. In view of the prevalence of voodoo in rural areas, it appeared likely that voodoo practitioners were targeted in some of these cases, although no examples were reported during the period covered by this report.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their cooperation in the political process. The Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Protestant Federation, and the Episcopal Church each had a seat on the Provisional Electoral Council, with which the embassy worked regularly as the council prepared for and conducted elections from February to April 2006.

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